Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski

Hero of the Polish Resistance

This biographical outline was compiled by David G. Jensen in October, 2017 from original research, primarily of the personal papers of Colonel M. J. Poniatowski-d'Ermengard, access to which was granted by his widow, the late Marie Brettrager d'Ermengard (Portland, Oregon). This document was prepared at her request.

MIECZYSŁAW JÓZEF (“PEPI”) PONIATOWSKI-D'ERMENGARD
1900-1996

by David G. Jensen

NOTE: in Polish surnames, the suffix -ski denotes one male, -ska one female, and -scy a family or clan, collectively.

The Poniatowscy are an old Polish noble family, of whom a continuous history begins in Poniawa, a village about 40 km west of Lublin, and from which the surname is derived. The earliest manuscript evidence dates from 1446. Other branches of the family include: Tłuk, Jarasz and Cioło. In Polish heraldry, the Poniatowscy are under the latter's coat-of-arms, hence the formal appendage h. Ciołek to the surname Poniatowski (h. < Pol. *herbu;* cf. Ger. *Erbe,* = 'heir').

Mieczysław Józef was the last male in direct descent from Stanisław II Augustus Poniatowski, who was born Stanisław Antoni Poniatowski on 17 Jan 1732. He was the son of Count Stanisław Poniatowski, Castellan of Kraków, and Princess Konstancja Czartoryska. The Czartoryscy were an esteemed and powerful family in both Lithuania and Poland. Stanisław was elected King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1764. The Coronation Sejm (Parliament) granted the title of prince to the eldest son in each generation (Mieczysław Józef had an older brother). Stanisław II would be the last King of Poland, last Grand Duke of Lithuania and the last monarch of the united Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Polish monarchy was elective rather than hereditary, and so there was no single royal family as such. The reign of Stanisław was beset by numerous threats, both foreign and domestic, which he attempted to address in an equable manner. His efforts culminated in the Constitution of 3 May 1791, a remarkable document for its time, but which infuriated Catherine the Great (1729-1796) of Russia, Stanisław's erstwhile paramour, and who initially had supported his election. Two more partitions followed, the first having occurred in 1772, and signaled the collapse of the fragile central government. Stanisław was obliged to abdicate in 1795. Poland was divided among neighboring Russia, Prussia and Austria, the latter then part of the Holy Roman Empire. Stanisław died on 12 Feb 1798.

Andrzej Poniatowski, the brother of Stanisław II, was the father of Prince Józef Antoni Poniatowski (born 7 May 1763), who fought valiantly in Austria, Poland, Russia and elsewhere before he was appointed a Maréchal d'Empire by Napoléon I (Emperor 1804-1814). During the retreat of the French after losing the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, the Prince was repeatedly wounded, and drowned in the Elster river. [Mieczysław Józef 's papers say: “killed at Leutzen.” The Battle of Lützen took place in May of 1813. The Sixth Coalition (of opposing European powers) were driven back by Napoléon, but at enormous cost of men. Napoléon and his surviving forces proceeded to Leipzig, where in October of 1813 they were decisively defeated.] Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski was the great, great grandson of Prince Józef Antoni Poniatowski.

The Poniatowscy secured their power and prestige throughout this period and beyond through marriage into aristocratic and royal Houses throughout Europe, among them the d'Ermengard, a ruling family in parts of Latin Europe since the so-called “Dark” Ages; which name Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski chose to adopt when he became an American citizen in 1957.

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Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski was born on 31 Mar 1900 in Słonim, Nowogródek, a Polish district then under Russian jurisdiction, and now (2017) part of Belarus. His father was Mieczysław Ignatius Poniatowski, born 20 Nov 1867. His mother was Maria Magdalena Von Worbs, born 27 Nov 1873.

Mieczysław Ignatius Poniatowski, Mieczysław Józef's father, had a distinguished military career, as did his son. His military honors included Knight of the Cross of Military Virtue (Poland's highest military award), the Independence Cross, the Cross of Valour, the Cross of Merit of the Order of Polonia Restituta and many other decorations. He was also long-time president of the Association Officers in the District of Poznań in Poland. Mieczysław Ignatius died on 6 Apr 1961 in Warszawa (Eng Warsaw), after long suffering. A memorial mass for him was offered at the Brompton Oratory in London on 28 June 1961.

Immediately after his birth, his mother took Mieczysław Józef to Moscow, where his father, then a General, commanded the Imperial Guard at the Kremlin, a post he held until the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917. In 1909, Mieczysław Józef stood with his father when Louis Bleriot (an early aviator, 1872-1936) landed his French plane next to Red Square to sell aviation concepts to the Imperial Army chiefs. In 1912, he rode with his father and Tsar Nicholas and Alexandra as their imperial landau rolled across the battlefield of Borodino, while the amassed regimental bands played Tchaikovsky's War of 1812 Overture and the Russian imperial anthem, to honor the centennial of the defeat of Napoléon outside of Moscow. Mieczysław Józef was educated in Moscow during those years. “Pepi,” as he was known, attended the Imperial Cadet School in Moscow, where he received a Certificate of Higher Learning on 15 May 1917, and then the Cavalry Officers' School in St. Petersburgh. From 15 December 1917 to 16 June 1918, he served as Cadet Officer in the 3rd Lancers Regiment (or Brigade), Polish Corps in Russia, alongside his father in operations against the Bolshevik revolutionaries near the contested border.

On 25 Oct 1960, Felix J. Ryl, on Pan-American World Airways System letterhead, wrote: “We were together at the Nicolai Guard Cavalry Brigade during the war against the Bolshevik Army. For his bravery and exemplary service during this campaign, Col. Poniatowski was decorated with the highest Polish Military award, the Virtuti Military [*recte* Militari].”

Compulsory demobilization was imposed by German Occupation troops from 17 Jun 1918 to 11 Oct 1918. The family fled to Poland. Mieczysław Józef continued in military service through the following decade.

12 Oct 1918 – 25 Mar 1919 Mieczysław Józef served in the Polish Military Organization in White Russia, now (2017) the eastern part of Belerus.

POLISH REGULAR ARMY

26 Mar 1919 – 23 Nov 1919: Mieczysław Józef served in the 11th Lancers Regiment. in operations against Soviet Russia.
24 Nov 1919 – 30 Apr 1920: he attended Officers' School in Warszawa and Przemyśl, both cities in modern Poland.
1 May 1920 – 31 Dec 1920: 2nd Lieutenant-Troop Commander 15th Lancers Regiment, in operations against Soviet Russia.
1 Jan 1921 – 31 Dec 1928: Lieutenant-Troop Commander 15th Lancers Regiment; Cavalry Training Centre, and President's Personal Guard.
1927: another record also states: Armoured School, Warszawa, 1927
1 Jan 1929 – 16 Mar 1934: 15th Lancers Regiment and 1st and 4th Armoured Regiments; Captain-Squadron Commander.

Mieczysław Józef was married 28 September 1929 in Poznań (Poland) to Maria Immaculata Ewa Jordan h. Trąby, who was born in Gołaszyn, Poland on 11 December 1909, the daughter of Stanisław and Maria née Szlagowski. Following long separation during wartime, Maria obtained divorce from Mieczysław Józef in Kraków, on 20 June 1951 (Decree reference no. 124/51).

Mieczysław Józef and Maria Immaculata had one daughter: Teresa Maria Poniatowska h. Ciołek , born 9 April 1930 in Poland, and raised in England. Teresa Maria married Tadeusz Święcicki h. Jastrzębiec (1918-1995) They had one daughter, Maria Aleksandra Teresa Święcicka h. Jastrzębiec, who was born in 1949. Maria Aleksandra married Roy Mytton Thornycroft (born 1945) and, later, Alfred Richard Steffens (1934-2012), by whom she had a daughter, Maja Steffens. Teresa Maria died in 1978.

Mieczysław Józef continued his military career through the 1930s:

1930 Tactical Course Cavalry Tr. Centre

A skilled horseman, he twice competed with the Polish equestrian team in the Olympic Games. In the later 1930's, as many in Europe prepared for war despite desperate attempts at appeasement, Mieczysław Józef, then a Major, served with the Polish Lancers opposing the German invasion, and after transferred to the last Polish Armored Division.

1934 Battalion Commanders' Course Inf. Tr. Centre
17 Mar 1934 – 20 Dec 1936: 2nd Lancers Regiment – Captain-Squadron Commander

In the mid-1930s, Menachem Begin (1913-1992), the future prime minister of Israel, served as a private in Mieczysław Józef's company near Brest-Litovsk, where he was found to be “brilliant but reluctant to follow orders.”

21 Dec 1936 – 17 Oct 1938: Armoured Corps Training Centre; Captain Major-Squadron Commander
18 Oct 1937[?8] – 4 Sep 1939: 10th Armoured Battalion – m2Ic, Acting C.O.

Germany began its swift invasion *(Blitzkrieg)* of Poland on 1 Sep 1939; the event ignited World War II, which became the largest and most destructive war in history, as World War I had been only a generation before. Colonel (the rank by which he is remembered) Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski did not falter in the defense of Poland and its allies.

20 Mar 1939: ?mobilization card (in Polish):
Ministerio Spraw Wojskowych, Biuro Personalne
mjr. służby czynnej Poniatowski, Mieczysław
Rocznik 31.3.1900 r.; karty115/4/39; Broń: Kadry 9 batalionu pancernego, Lublin

5 Sep 1939 – 18 Sep 1939: No. 2 Armoured Corps Reserve, Major; 2iC
19 Sep 1939 – 18 Jan 1940: Internment in Rumania;

Having escaped internment in Rumania, Mieczysław Józef joined the Polish forces in France, where he was confirmed as a Major, and proceeded thereafter to Great Britain, where he was confirmed as a Major in the Armoured Corps.

19 Jan 1940 – : Journey to Polish Forces in France
10 Feb 1940 – 31 Mar 1940: Rallying Station in Paris, Major
1 Apr 1940 – 10 Apr 1940: Armoured Corps Training Centre, Training Battalion Major-C.O.
11 Apr 1940 – 11 May 1940: 34th Light Tanks Battalion 5th French Army, Major, attached
12 May 1940 – 23 Aug 1940: Armoured Corps Training Centre, Battalion-Major-C.O.
4 Aug 1940 – 11 Oct 1940: Armoured Corps Cadet Officers Training Unit, (Major-C.O.
12 Oct 1940 – 5 Jan 1942: Armoured Corps Training Centre, Major-2iC
6 Jan 1942 – 15 Aug 1942: Course for OiC Battalions, Major – Instructor
16 Aug 1942 – 31 Aug 1943: 1st Armoured Train. Group, Major-2iC
1943: R.A.C. Gunnery & Radio Courses, Bovington
1 Sep 1943 – 23 Apr 1944: R.A.C. Officers Tactical School, London; Major, Liaison Officer; R.
24 Apr 1944 – 15 May 1944: at the disposal of Commander-in-Chief's Special Unit.
16 May 1944 – 8 Nov 1944 in hospital after vertebra fracture in parachute drop; [into Poland].
Mieczysław Józef was subsequently assigned to Armored Headquarters staff as a Colonel.
The medical report from Military Hospital, Liverpool Rd., Chester, 22 May 1944 states:
16 May 1944 Major Mieczysław Josef Poniatowski 07839 Polish Army, 51 S.T.S., crush fracture 1st lumbar vertebra 16 May [19]44, parachute descent injury; comfortable in plaster jacket for10+ weeks; some head discomfort from injury; honorably discharged from the Polish Forces under British command in 1948. The Orthopedic Specialist's report adds that he was “Fit for sedentary duties.”

demobilization form #6005 (in French) Paris, 5 September 1945
career officer; address before hostilities: Lodz ((Poland); and after: 5 Palace Court, London W2
mobilized 2 Oct 1940 Bessières, Paris; previous corps: Bat. de Serrigant; rank: Cmdt. de Bat.

The military career of Mieczysław Józef Piniatowski was noteworthy for his wits and courage.
The following list of the honors and Awards he received may not be exhaustive:
Polish: Order Virtuti Militari – Class V;
Cross of Valour – 6 times; Golden Cross for Merits; Independence Medal; War Medal (1918-1920)
Bronze Long Service Medal; Silver Long Service Medal
British: Defence Medal, War Medal 1939-1945
French: Medaille Interaliée, 1918; Medaille Commémorative Française de la Guerre 1939-1945, No. 657
Wounds: wounded twice in 1918-20
9 Nov 1944 – 27 Aug 1945 – Liaison Officers Group at 12th U.S.A. Army Group; Major, Lieutenant-Colonel
28 Aug 1945 – 29 Nov 1945 Armoured Corps Training Centre, Lieutenant-Colonel; attached GHQ
30 Nov 1945 – 9 May 1946 Armoured Corps Regulation Board, Lieutenant-Colonel; attached GHQ
10 May 1946 – 8 Oct 1946 Armoured Corps Training Centre, Lieutenant-Colonel; attached GHQ
8 Oct 1946: honourably discharged from the Polish Land Forces under British command w.e.f.

9 Oct 1946: commissioned into the Polish Resettlement Corps; Pers. No. Polish/457.
The Polish Resettlement Corps (P.R.C. ; Polish Polski Korpus Przysposobienia i Rozmieszczenia) was established by the British government in 1946 for members of the Polish military who who had served under British command during the War, and did not wish to return to newly Communist Poland; it was disbanded in 1946. At least 250,000 Polish veterans were present in 1945.

20 Sep 1949: from Polish Resettlement Corps, Record Office, Witley Camp, Godalming, Surrey:
P.R.C. - O.F. 147, Ref. No. OFF/50666/1621/B: No. P/405 Mieczyslaw Poniatowski not convicted of any crime or misdemeanor; “conduct was very good” while in Polish Forces under British Command, from 7 Jan 1940 to 10 Aug 1946. Enlisted into P.R.C. 10 Sep 1946; discharged 23 May 1948

15 Feb 1950: P.R.A.S. – OF 14: Polish Records Aftermath Section, Witley Camp, Godalming, Surrey [England]
Ref. No.: AFT/2/08/47/C/50./
P/4057 Lt. Col. M. J. Poniatowski
Polish Forces under British Command from 1 Jul 40, discharged w.e.f. 8 Oct 1946;
while in Polish Land Forces held the rank of Lt. Col.
“Conduct very good”
Enlisted in P.R.C. 9 Oct 1946 as 2/Lt. local paid rank of Lt. Col.
Relegated to Class “W” Reserve on 1 November 1947
Discharged from P.R.C.; on absorption into industry w.e.f. 29 May 1948 as 2/Lt. With paid local rank Lt. Col.

13 Jul 1948: notice from the War Office, London:
POLISH/4057/1 (MS2B) Lieutenant-Colonel M. J. Poniatowski
“ ... in view of your absorption into industry, You will relinquish your commission in the Polish Resettlement Corps with effect from 29 May 1948.”

During those intervening years in London, Mieczysław Józef resided at 5 Palace Court, London W2. His agent or legal counsel in London for Polish matters was Z. Horodecki, Consultant in Polish and International Law, 19 Radcliffe Square, London SW 10 .

In addition to his military exploits, It should be noted that the advantages of his background endowed Mieczysław Józef with a refined taste in the arts and other cultural pursuits. An acute memory aided his interest in the music and literature of Central Europe and Russia. He saw and heard the great dancers, singers and composers of his time, and was among the first to make a round-trip on the newly completed Trans-Siberian railroad. He was able to distinguish among the twelve varieties of caviar sold in the stalls along Hunters' Row (now Gorky Street) in Moscow. He relished the splendorous pre-Revolutionary opera and ballet performances at the Bolshoi and Marinsky theaters in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and to the end of his life he could recite long passages from the great poets of Russia and France.
In 1951 Mieczysław Józef emigrated to the United States as a civilian. Departing from Southampton, England, he

arrived on 19 October 1951 in New York (City) aboard the SS Washington. His Declaration of Intention (to establish residence), dated 29 February 1952, includes the following details: complexion, fair; hair, brown; height, 5' 9"; weight, 140; and nationality, stateless. He also notes that his former wife Maria resided at that time in British Somaliland (northeastern Africa).

Fluent in English, French, and Russian, "Pepi" worked as chief scientific translator for McGraw-Hill, specializing in manuscripts (primarily Russian) on rocketry and thermodynamics. A letter dated 21 June 1960 from Carl E. Nagel, a Vice-President at McGraw-Hill, thanks Mieczysław Józef for his work, but indicates that his position is terminated due to the decision of the U.S. Air Force to transfer overseas the contract under which he was employed.

In 1957, he became an American citizen, adopting the full name: Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski-d'Ermengard, as follows:
U.S.A. Certificate of Naturalization #7771113, Petition #682079; 7 January 1957:
Mieczyslaw Joseph Ponitowski-d'Ermengard; res. 332 West 83rd Street, New York, NY
He changed his name (English spellings) by decree of court from
Mieczyslaw Joseph Poniatowski to Mieczyslaw Joseph Poniatowski-d'Ermengard.

He thereafter moved west to Portland, Oregon where he joined the foreign language department at the University of Portland, a private school under Roman Catholic auspices, and which has no connection to Portland State University, despite the similarity of their names.

On 5 November 1960 Mieczysław Józef married Wanda Elizabeth Ploska, who was born 24 October 1906 in Dobromil, Lwów, Poland (before World War I, Austrian Galicia). Prior to her emigration to the United States, she had achieved prominence as the first female jurist in Poland.

In 1962 he joined the Russian department at Portland State College, which became a university in 1969 and is now the predominant member of the state (Oregon) system of higher education. He achieved renown there for his skill in teaching Russian, which he continued well past the regular retirement age. A letter dated 2 February 1965 from Branford Millar, then President of Portland State College, approves the request made to the Chancellor, dated 26 January 1965, by Mieczysław Józef to continue teaching past the age of 65 years.
In a letter dated 2 December 1969, H. F. Peters, Head of the Department of Foreign Languages, confirms Mieczysław Józef's retirement at the end of the academic year (Spring, 1970), when he will have reached the statutory retirement age of 70. On 3 July 70, he also received a letter from Governor Tom McCall, thanking him for his years of service to the State of Oregon.
[NOTE: the offering of Russian language courses was unusual at the time, and drew favorable attention to Portland State College. Language courses in the public schools, both secondary and post-secondary, then were confined largely to three major living languages of Europe, viz. French, German and Spanish. Some instruction in Classical Latin remained into the 1960s, when the subject fell almost entirely into disfavor. The scope of language study has broadened considerably since that time, although the methods of teaching are less rigorous than formerly.]

After Wanda's death, Colonel Poniatowski-d'Ermengard married Marie Lorraine Brettrager of Portland, who cared for him until his death. She was born 6 October 1927 in Chicago, IL; her mother was Marie Catherine Arenth, and her father John Joseph Brettrager. Marie and Mieczysław Józef wed on 27 October 1985 at Queen of Angels Priory in Mount Angel, Oregon. Their marriage license was obtained on 21 October 1985, Multnomah County Book 310, Page 414, and effective 24 October 1985.

Colonel Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski-d'Ermengard died on Friday, 13 December 1996. [American SSN 103-28-1718-A. Death Certificate: ID Tag No. 221099; Local File Number 2300; Oregon State File Number 96-027303.] A military Mass was offered at 2:00 pm on Saturday, 28 December 1996 in the Benedictine Convent Chapel at Mount Angel, Oregon.

Thomas Vaughan, Oregon Historian Laureate and a longtime friend, observed: "The Colonel was one of our illustrious veterans of 20th Century warfare. He fought with bravery and skill against the Russian revolutionaries and against the German armies in the two great World Wars."

* * *

OBITUARY OF MIECZYSŁAW IGNATIUS PONIATOWSKI (1867-1961)

FATHER OF MIECZYSŁAW JÓZEF

Ś. P. (*abbrev* = "of blessèd memory")
Mieczysław Poniatowski
General Brygady = *Eng* "Brigade"

Kawałer Krzyża Virtuti Militari, odznaczony Krzyżem Niepodieglości, ł-krotnie Krzyżem Walecznych 2-krot, Zi. Krzyżem Zaslugi Orderem Polonia Restituta oraz wieloma innymi odznaczeniami.
Knight of the Cross of Military Virtue, awarded the Independence Cross, the Cross of Valour, the Cross of Merit of the Order of Polonia Restituta and many other decorations.

Długoletni prezes Stowarzyszenia Oficerów w st. sp. Okręgu Poznańskiego,
Longtime president of the Association Officers in the District of Poznań,

Opatrzony Św. Sakramentami po dlugich I ciężkich cierpieniach zmarł ł czerwca 1961 w Warszawie przeżywszy lat 93.
Having received the Holy Sacraments after long and severe suffering, he died in June of 1961 at the age of 93 in Warsaw.

Msza Święta na Jego intencję odprawiona będzie w Brompton Oratory w Londynie w kaplicy Matki Boskiej Kazielskiej we Kazielskiej we środę 28 czerwca o godz 9.
Holy Mass for his intention will be celebrated in the Brompton Oratory in London in the chapel of Our Lady ?Kazielskiej in Kazielskiej on Wednesday 28 June at 9.

O bołesnej stracie zawiadamiaja
A painful loss to announce

ŻONA Q KRAJU, SYNOWIE. SYNOWE, WNUCZKA, PRAWNUCZKA, RODZINA I PRZYJACIELE W ANGLII I ST. ZJEDNOCZONYCH.
WIFE, COUNTRY, SONS. Sons, granddaughter, Great-granddaughter FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN ENGLAND AND UNITED STATES

9035

* * *

from Abbreviated Death Certificate – "born 20 November 1867 : died 6 April 1961"

* * *

The following transcription of a brochure found among the effects of Mieczysław Józef Poniatowski (1900-1996) provides a context for certain episodes in his biography:

For private distribution only.

THE ASSOCIATION OF EX-REGULAR MEMBERS OF
THE POLISH ARMED FORCES IN GREAT BRITAIN

c/o Polish Naval Association, 80, Drayton Gardens, London, S.W. 10

F**ATE IN GREAT BRITAIN OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE POLISH REGULAR ARMY**

CONTENTS.

Foreword.
1. Pledges.
2. Scheme in Operation.
3. Actual Position.
4. Moral and Political Background of the Problem.
Summary.

LONDON, NOVEMBER 1950.

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION.

The enclosed memorandum is intended to draw your attention to the distressing position expounded in it, and to make recommendations for its possible alleviation.

FATE IN GREAT BRITAIN OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE POLISH REGULAR ARMY

FOREWORD

The problem of Polish soldiers in Great Britain arose as one of the consequences of the war waged by the Allies for the cause of freedom. These men came to Great Britain in the course of the war, not as political emigrés or men seeking employment in a foreign country. They were invited to come here to take part in the defense of this country.

Public opinion in Great Britain is ignorant of the true facts, and has not yet understood how big is the problem of the fate of these soldiers, and how significant. We are convinced that if the British people were fully informed of the hard lot endured by the ex-soldiers of an allied country, they would be deeply concerned with it.

Every man is entitled to decent conditions of life, to just treatment – not to have to drag out his existence in poverty verging on destitution and degradation. This axiom is accepted by all decent-minded people in Great Britain and by responsible political leaders. Nevertheless, there is in Great Britain today one group of persons of whom it may be said that the accepted rights, if not actually withheld, are in serious jeopardy.

These persons are the former members of the Polish regular army, men who, nobody will seriously deny, did their duty during the war, fighting for the freedom and liberation of the countries subjugated by the enemy. Let us remember that in fulfilling the tasks assigned to them these soldiers were prompted by many pledges which reassured them about their future.

PLEDGES

On the 21st June 1940, ,after the fall of France, P.M. Winston Churchill invited the Polish Armed forces still in France to come to Great Britain, declaring to the late General Władisław Sikorski – then Polish Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief: “We will perish together or vanquish together.”

On the 24th August of the same year the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, assured the Poles that “the courage of their soldiers, sailors and airmen would never be forgotten.”

These words were repeated on many occasions and in different forms by the most eminent British personages. Even at the time when Polish interests were most in danger and when the consequences of the solutions imposed on Poland became apparent, foreshadowing a possible refusal by the Polish soldiers under British command to return to their home country. Mr. Winston Churchill declared in the House of Commons (27.2.1945): ... “In any event, His Majesty's Government will never forget the debt they owe to the Polish troops who have served them so valiantly.”

And further on: ... “So far as we are concerned, we should think it an honour to have such faithful and valiant warriors dwelling among us as if they were men of our own blood. (Cf. Hansard, Vol.408, No. 39, page 1284).

After the end of the war operations, on the eve of the disbandment of the Polish Armed Forces under British Command, Mr. Ernest Bevin, speaking about the Polish soldiers, said in the House of Commons: (20.3.1946):

“Those who nevertheless feel compelled to remain abroad in full knowledge of the present situation will be treated, as far as our resources permit, with due recognition of their gallant service.” (Cf. Hansard, 20th March 1946, Vol. 420, No. 106, page 1885: Message from the British Foreign Secretary to all members of the Polish Forces under British Command.)

The War Office message, under the heading: ... “Polish Resettlement Corps,” published in August 1946 and distributed to every member of the Polish Forces, amongst other things promised:

... “The British Army wishes sincerely to do everything which is possible to assist Polish comrades in arms, who served the common cause in the course of the war...

... “For your own sake you are advised to enlist in the P.R.C. You may be sure that you will be welcomed by the British Army, which will help you by every means to find a place in civilian life in the United Kingdom or abroad.

... “The duration of the service is set for two years in order to have every opportunity of finding employment for you.

... “The British Army will try hard to prepare you for civil life here or abroad.

... “The main purpose of the P.R.C. will be to find you permanent employment in civil life...

... “Everything will be done to place you where you may wish.

“The P.R.C. was established exclusively exclusively for the purpose of assisting you. If you do not enlist in it the British Army will be unable to help you. If you do, we will do everything possible to secure you a good job.”

All these pledges had wide circulation amongst Polish soldiers and Polish civilians. Their purpose was to encourage Poles to do their utmost for the common cause. This cause was understood by all Polish quarters as being truly a common one, and the members of the regular army contributed their due share.

The consequences of failure to abide by these pledges have been most serious for the former members of the Polish Regular Army, both in their conditions of everyday life and in their general state of mind.

SCHEMES IN OPERATION

After the withdrawal of recognition from the Polish Government in exile in 1945 and the disbandment of the Polish Armed Forces, His Majesty's Government form the Polish Resettlement Corps.

The main purpose of the P.R.C. Was to resettle the soldiers, providing them with good permanent civilian employment (War Office message of August 1946). This would of course have the additional advantage of providing a considerable amount of manpower which could play a useful part in the urgent tasks of reconstruction which faced the British people.

Within the P.R.C., a distinction was made between a small number of soldiers who were assigned certain duties, and the majority. This majority received while they remained in the P.R.C. Only part of their pay, sufficient for bare necessities and leaving no margin for saving.

Members of the former Polish Armed Forces as a whole, including both regulars and those enlisted for the duration of the war, are at present employed in the following way:

4,000 soldiers and their dependents are employed in brick and glass works.
6.000 have their own businesses.
8,000 are in the steel industry.
11,000 are in the textile industry.
9,000 are in the mines.
12,500 are in agriculture and forestry.
17,000 are in building trades.
19,500 are in hotels, the watering trade, hospitals, etc.

Total. 87,000 employed,

while 9,000 are unfit for work and 6,500 are disabled.

The proportion of manual workers in Great Britain is 22%, while the respective figure for the Poles settled in this country in 80%.

The final report of the P.R.C. stated the following:

“ ... Resettlement has been more successful than was expected ... Reports from employers are excellent.” (Cf. *The Manchester Guardian,* 1.10.1949).

All the ex-soldiers employed are now ordinary British tax-payers, contributing to the assets of this country.

From the British point of view this solution is very satisfactory. From the point of view of the Poles who were not regular soldiers the solution has also been relatively satisfactory. Young people and men with a profession have been resettled without great difficulty, and although they may not all be ideally suited to the ways in which they are employed, it is appreciated that the whole problem of resettlement has been a complex and difficult one.

The position of the ex-regular Polish soldier is, however, quite different. After the army was disbanded he immediately lost the only the only profession he knew; he was deprived of the pension, which he had always rightly regarded as one of his emoluments, and he found himself in an extremely difficulty position for which his previous life had not prepared him. He was stranded on the labour market, with all his shortcomings, sometimes due to old age, or ruined health, or his lack of vocational training, or all of them.

The Act P.R.S. 1947 foresaw financial assistance for those who – after the lapse of their P.R.C. Contracts – still could not find employment, namely: Unemployment Benefit, paid by National Insurance, and allowances paid by the National Assistance Board on the strength of the National Assistance Act, which replaced the rule concerning assistance to paupers (Poor Law). As a matter of fact both of them are available to any aliens settled in this country within the general framework of the law.

In particularly difficult cases grants may therefore by obtained from the Assistance Board. This allowance is given to people in a distressed financial position or to paupers who are not entitled to an allowance from any other source. The grant received from the Board helps the recipients not to become beggars that is to say, offenders against the common law. It is meant as a temporary subsidy, paid according to the discretion of the authorities, being a kind of official alms.

Unemployment benefit is intended for men who have lost their jobs, it being understood that this is a temporary allowance and not a permanent means of existence.

At the best, the allowance from either fund is not enough to cover the most modest needs of older members of the regular army. They are in fact reduced to subsistence level, a tragic fate for men who have served an honourable profession, and consistently done their duty.

It appears therefore that the Polish ex-soldier is willing to work and contribute efficiently to the economic recovery of Great Britain according to his capacity, but if his background and past occupation have qualified him rather for the sedentary or white-collar type of job, he has very little chance of contributing as efficiently as he would like.

The position of the intelligentsia and the ex-regular officers and N.C.O., especially the older ones, is now critical, for the schemes in operation give them no real prospects.

Let us consider the following facts:

ACTUAL POSITION

On the strength of four years' experience and examination of the evidence in our possession, we can draw the following conclusions:

High Death Rate. When the P.R.C. was wound up, the final report of his body stated the alarming mortality figures in the ranks of the P.R.C. This report explained these abnormal figures in the following way: “The high death rate accounted for over three thousand, most of whom were aged and infirm members, who could not survive their wartime experiences.” (*The Manchester Guardian,* (1.10.1949).

Apart from cases of deaths due to war experiences, hardships and depression, the following special and particularly striking examples should be recorded:

A colonel, former Military Attaché (Virtuti Militari, Cross of Military Valour, and other decorations), a major, a brigadier Virtuti Militari, Cross of Military Valour (British D.S.O.). a captain, a major of the Corps of Military Engineers – died at work, engaged as manual workers.

They were driven to accept manual work by poverty, the attitude, it must be said, adopted towards their affairs in certain Employment exchanges, and the inadequate assistance which debased their self-respect. In all these cases it could be said that these men could have lived for another twenty or thirty years, as useful members of the community. Unsuitable Employment. White-collar workers and ex-officers have the opportunity to register with an Appointments Office to obtain suitable employment. Unfortunately such work was obtained only in a few, quite exceptional, cases. As a rule ex-regular soldiers are offered jobs as unskilled manual worker of the lowest grade by the Local Labour Exchanges. Generals are employed as lift-men, colonels as porters and dish-washers, cleaners, hospital orderlies, stokers, etc. In many cases they have been obliged to give up their work, having contracted serious illnesses. Many have become infirm on account of unsuitable work.

We wish to quote one example from many others. A group of forty intellectuals and older ex-regular soldiers are employed in a factory. One of this group is a former member of the Supreme Court, aged 66, another a general over 60 years of age, and the remainder are all over 50. This group worked for several weeks as a night-shift. It is striking that such an offer was made by the particular Employment Exchange which dealt with their case. The consequence of such work can already be seen. Their state of health with in sic a couple of months is a foregone conclusion. In all these cases the men were obliged to accept the work from sheer poverty. Official pressure, and the inadequacy of public assistance, whose receipt in any case they were bound to find degrading.

Unemployed and Unfit for Work. A the end of the war there were already a small group of men unfit for work on account of the hardships they had endured. This group increased rapidly after the winding up of the Polish Resettlement Corps, because of the conditions in which they found themselves.

Poverty increasing from day to day and he progress of moral and physical collapse in this category of men have already constituted a very serious problem. The condition was best explained in the report by the Central Committee of the Polish Medical Association on the 25th May 1950. Based on observations by Polish practitioners of their Polish patients over the age of fifty, not employed in their usual professions (ex-regular soldiers belong to this category) and directed to manual work, these statements are very alarming from every point of view. We give below some extracts from this most interesting document:

" ... An abnormal number of men over fifty years of age has lately been noticed in the consulting rooms of Polish practitioners: they were men of various professions (with the exception of doctors and dentists) who, without any chance of working in their own professions and with no private means, have been directed to physical labour for which they are utterly unfit ...

"In normal circumstances old age changes which occur after fifty decrease the ability to work; as regards Poles living in exile these changes are being considerably accelerated by the following factors: the trying years of war, the change of climate and surroundings at an advanced age, the lack of financial security for the future, emotional shocks, and many other reasons.

"It is justly admitted that with older people living under normal conditions the continuance of professional jobs, if not as intense as with younger people, is the perfect means of delaying the process of ageing Brit spelling. But while such people work in their own professions, to which they have been accustomed since early youth, the Polish exiles of the professional classes are mostly doing heavy manual work for the first time in their lives, and this has a depressing effect on their mental and physical health. It requires physical exertion and effort, for very often it is on a piece-work basis. With elderly]people negative symptoms appear in a short time: nervous depression, heart and coronary troubles, etc. rapidly. The ageing process is considerably accelerated. All the mild or chronic diseases become acute and develop rapidly.

"At the moment it would not be possible to produce accurate statistical data based on exact figures. But what the Association can declare, taking full responsibility for the statement, is that daily practice and experience clearly show an alarming deterioration of health and an abnormally accelerated process of ageing in their patients amongst the Polish intelligentsia over fifty years of age and earning their living by manual work.

"We feel it is our duty to emphasise Brit spelling that the attention of the competent British authorities should be drawn to this fact."

MORAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM.

The fate of the Polish ex-regular soldiers has so far been presented from the purely human point of view. But that is only one aspect of the problem. The moral and political factors must not be overlooked, as they have a bearing on both the present and the future.

The British-Polish Alliance of 1939, proposed by Great Britain and accepted by Poland, bound the destiny of the Polish Nation to that of Great Britain. It weighed heavily on the political decisions of the Polish government in the 1939 crisis and encouraged the Polish Nation in her resistance to Hitlerite aggression.

According to the clauses of this agreement Poland expected British assistance in the event of war and was entitled to assume that such a conflict would be conducted in conformity with Polish interests and war aims.

In the September1939 campaign Poland fought alone, quite unaided.

In spite of that she did not surrender after the defeat, did not come to terms with the invader, produced no quislings, but on the strength of the clauses of the alliance and prompted by her confidence in the moral values and loyalty of the allies, she prepared for further fierce resistance against the common enemy.

When the very existence of Great Britain was at stake (1940-1941),the Poles were the only allies actively fighting at her side.

The Polish political and military authorities made the utmost effort to organise the struggle against the common enemy, both in the home country and abroad. The contribution of the 1939 campaign in Poland and the war effort of Poland both in the home country and abroad brought to the allied cause the following advantages:

– the experiences of the 1939 campaign, recorded in detail by the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces and forwarded to the Allies,

– the Underground Movement in Poland, engaging considerable enemy forces for the occupation of the country; most valuable information, supplied during the whole course of the war by the well organised *Brit spelling* intelligence service, and of paramount importance for the general conduct of the war, In particular it was due to the Intelligence service that Britain learnt details of the V.1. In time to make advance preparations against it.

– The Polish Armed Forces, twice reconstituted during the war (250.000 men) carried out all the tasks assigned to them, winning the full appreciation of the Allies.

– In the Battle of Britain, the Polish Air Force played a role whose importance was all out of proportion to the number of Poles engaged – a fact to which members of the R.A.F. will readily testify.

– The Polish Navy and Merchant Marine contributed their due share to the common war effort.

- The foundation of this war effort was supplied by the Polish regular soldiers, trained at the cost of the Polish Nation.
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At the end of the war it turned out that only her allies had benefited from these enormous efforts of the Polish Nation and her armed forces. The Poles trusted their Allies. They believed that they were fighting for a common cause.

Judging, however, by the final results, the war was carried on with utter disregard for the most vital Polish interests. Polish political and military quarters were debarred from all bodies charged with the conduct of the war. A series of treaties which decided the fate of Poland already at the end of 1943 were not disclosed to them for many months. The outcome of the war showed that Poland was reduced to – a puppet state ruled from Moscow. A reign of terror was imposed. Poles were deprived of their political liberties and ruthlessly suppressed, and for the Poles in Great Britain there was no way back to freedom in their own land. Nevertheless, although they lost their own country, the Poles in Great Britain were still partners – and faithful partners – in a victorious war. That is the fact which the British people, – if they are to keep faith, can never lose sight of.

This memorandum is not the place to discuss the merits of the whole of the Teheran and Yalta agreements, but it is difficult to deny that those Governments which made the decisions have a clear responsibility for their consequences. One of these consequences is the lamentable fate of the Polish regular soldiers now in Great Britain.

In the present position of the world the cause of Poland, apart from its moral aspects, has a great practical importance. In the clash between barbarism, represented by the Soviet side, and Western civilization, there are also spiritual values which must weigh besides the armed forces and armaments. The cause of Poland stands as a test case and the injustice done her at Teheran and Yalta can in some small degree, even at this late hour, be put right by just treatment of those Poles, whose profession was that of arms.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The arrival of Polish soldiers in Great Britain was due to the course of the war and war developments.

Public opinion in this country is not aware of the conditions in which many of them are now forced to live.

His Majesty's Government, together with the other Allied Governments, has a clear responsibility for the present state of affairs, and there is no other quarter to which ex-regular Polish soldiers can look for justice and some degree of protection.

After the war Polish soldiers were used for the sole benefit of the British economy, and the ex-regular soldiers have in fact been directed almost exclusively to manual work. Attempts to find suitable work for the older members of the Polish forces have largely failed, and the consequences to these people's health and happiness have been disastrous.

The financial assistance so far received by them is inadequate, and the way in which it is given hurts their self-respect. They have received no pensions and their rights have not been secured in any way.

The argument that His Majesty's Government can evade future financial responsibility on the legalistic grounds that there were no provisions in international agreements for the payment of pensions to ex-regular members of Allied forces is, we submit, consistent neither with the dignity nor with the high principles of British democracy.

The ex-regular Polish soldier wishes to work and to be a useful member of the community in this country according to his capacity. Time has shown the overwhelming difficulties in the way of finding adequate work according to that capacity for the great majority of ex-regular soldiers.

He wishes the following principles, proclaimed by His Majesty's Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. C. Attlee, at the end of his broadcast on the 30th July 1950, may also be applied to him:
“Finally I would ask you to keep ever in mind the value of the things for which we stand, freedom, democracy, justice and the supremacy of the moral law.”

Justice to ex-regular Polish soldiers will be done only when they are given pensions such as they would be entitled to had the country, to help which Great Britain went to war, remained free. Polish and British regular troops fought for the same cause. They merit similar rewards.

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